

The Spreading Art of Tae Kwon Do

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This past summer, after three years of practice, I tested for and received my black belt in tae kwon do from the Hyong Moo Do Academy in Savoy, Illinois. Tae Kwon Do, a Korean martial art, is an increasingly common and growing part of the interest in martial arts in Champaign-Urbana today. Tae Kwon Do, after rapidly spreading from its roots in Korea, has come to settle here in Illinois.

The practice of martial arts can be seen throughout the history of Korea. Tae Kwon Do is a relatively recent form of Korean martial arts strongly influenced by older Korean and Japanese martial arts. When the Japanese occupied Korea from 1909 to 1945, all practice of martial arts was banned and only practiced underground. Once Korea was liberated from Japan, martial arts came out of the dark and interest in the forbidden arts boomed. The many masters of schools, or *kwans*, of martial arts in Korea soon began to communicate in order to unify their teachings. In 1955, the name “*tae kwon do*” was chosen as the official name of this Korean martial art. “Tae Kwon Do” can be translated as “the way of the foot and fist.”

Korean masters soon began to spread tae kwon do to other countries through a tour in 1960. The World Tae Kwon Do Federation, the international organization for tae kwon do as a sport, was founded in 1973. The first international competition was held in 1973 and included 19 countries. Because tae kwon do masters successfully spread their art, tae kwon do is now the most popular and widely practiced martial in the world today.

Tae Kwon Do has made its way to the Champaign-Urbana area in Illinois. The earliest tae kwon do academy in this area, which is still here and thriving today, is the Hyong Moo Do Academy in Savoy. Nam Kwon Hyong came from Seoul, Korea, to the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign in 1969 to study economics as a foreign student. One of Nam Kwon's professors at the university asked Nam Kwon to teach tae kwon do to his child. Soon after, in 1970, Nam Kwon founded the Illini Club to publicly teach tae kwon do on the University of Illinois campus.

In 1980, Nam Kwon's younger brother, Namsoo Hyong, came from Korea to the United States and took over the Illini Tae Kwon Do Club and established another academy in Savoy, the Hyong Moo Do, or H.M.D. Academy. At this time, the H.M.D. Academy was, like most tae kwon do academies, focused on training for and winning sparring matches, such as done in the Summer Olympics.

However, in 1983, Namsoo and Nam Kwon changed their academy into a non-competitive academy, meaning that they would no longer train their students to participate in sparring competitions. Instead, the Hyong brothers developed a new philosophy called "*Moo Do*," meaning "art," that taught tae kwon do as an art form, rather than as a sport. Namsoo Hyong, known as Master Hyong today, focuses on individual students' goals and progress. Master Hyong strives to build self-confidence and give students a sense of accomplishment individually by de-emphasizing the win-lose situation of sparring.

Master Hyong has influenced the Champaign-Urbana community significantly. Over 12,000 students attend or have attended the H.M.D. Academy or the Illini Tae Kwon Do Club since they were founded. Master Hyong believes that tae kwon do should

help students develop confidence and discipline, as well as the ability to defend themselves, through healthy physical activity.

These ideas essential to Hyong's Moo Do philosophy have been rapidly spreading in the past several years. Master Hyong teaches his students about his philosophy in-depth through his instructor program, so that his students can teach other students. Then, when these instructors move, they can start a new academy teaching his Moo Do philosophy. There are academies that connect back to the H.M.D. Academy located in Boston, Seattle, Oregon, Arizona, Texas, South Dakota, and even England. Master Hyong plans to expand next into Brazil, Russia, and China. However, Master Hyong personally focuses on Illinois, having several academies throughout the state, including in Chicago, Monticello, and Tuscola, in addition to Savoy.

Since the founding of the H.M.D. Academy, several other academies, building on the increasing interest in martial arts, have appeared in the Champaign-Urbana area, including White Tiger Tae Kwon Do. Master Louis Thursh founded his academy in Champaign in 2000. The success and influence of Master Hyong's academy has caused an increased appreciation of martial arts. There is now an annual Martial Arts Festival, which includes demonstrations of the different martial arts in the Champaign-Urbana area.

In a relatively short time, tae kwon do has spread from Korea to other countries, and has set roots here, all the way across the world. Ever since Nam Kwon's immigration into Illinois in order to attend the University of Illinois, seeds of interest in tae kwon do and other martial arts have been planted and have grown here in Champaign-Urbana, as

seen by the success in academies such as H.M.D. Academy. [From "History." North America Tae Kwon Do. <<http://www.natkd-cdk.com/history.htm>> (Aug. 28, 2007); H.M.D, Academy, <<http://www.hmdacademy.com/info.html>> (Aug. 28, 2007); Student historian's interview with Namsoo Hyong, Sept. 19, 2007; Student historian's interview with Louis Thursh, Sept. 14, 2007; White Tiger Tae Kwon Do. <<http://www.wtigertkd.com/>> (Sept. 4, 2007); and The World Tae Kwon Do Federation. <<http://www.wtf.org/>> (Sept. 4, 2007).]